



June 7, 2001

Mr. Don Bradley
Assistant General Counsel
Texas Department of Health
1100 West 49th Street
Austin, Texas 78756-3199

OR2001-2362

Dear Mr. Bradley:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 148125.

The Texas Department of Health (the "department") received a request for certain job descriptions and for interview questions and responses regarding certain job postings. You state that most of the requested information has been or will be released to the requestor. You claim, however, that portions of the submitted documents are excepted from disclosure under sections 552.117 and 552.122 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.122(b) excepts from disclosure test items developed by a licensing agency or governmental body. In Open Records Decision No. 626 (1994), this office determined that the term "test item" in section 552.122 includes any standard means by which an individual's or group's knowledge or ability in a particular area is evaluated, but does not encompass evaluations of an employee's overall job performance or suitability. Additionally, when answers to test questions might reveal the questions themselves, the answers may be withheld under section 552.122(b). *See* Open Records Decision No. 626 at 8 (1994). Whether information falls within the section 552.122 exception must be determined on a case-by-case basis. *Id.* at 6. Traditionally, this office has applied section 552.122 where release of "test items" might compromise the effectiveness of future examinations. *Id.* at 4-5; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 118 (1976).

After reviewing the submitted information, we agree that the interview questions that you have highlighted constitute "test items" as contemplated by section 552.122(b). Accordingly, the department may withhold the highlighted interview questions, and their respective preferred and actual answers, pursuant to section 552.122(b) of the Government Code.

We turn now to your assertion that the social security numbers contained in the submitted documents are excepted under section 552.117 of the Government Code. Section 552.117 excepts from disclosure the home address and telephone number, social security number, and family member information of a current or former official or employee of a governmental body who requests that this information be kept confidential under section 552.024. Whether a particular piece of information is protected by section 552.117 must be determined at the time the request for it is made. *See* Open Records Decision No. 530 at 5 (1989). You state that the employees identified in the submitted documents have made elections under section 552.024 requesting that the department withhold certain information from public disclosure, and that you have marked the submitted documents in accordance with each employee's election. Therefore, pursuant to section 552.117(1) of the Government Code, the department must withhold the social security numbers in the submitted documents.

To summarize, we conclude that: (1) the department may withhold the highlighted interview questions, and their respective preferred and actual answers, pursuant to section 552.122(b) of the Government Code; and (2) pursuant to section 552.117(1), the department must withhold the social security numbers in the submitted documents. The remaining submitted information must be released to the requestor.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at 877/673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Department of Public Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.--Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the General Services Commission at 512/475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Karen A. Eckerle
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

KAE/sdk

Ref: ID# 148125

Encl: Submitted documents

cc: Ms. Vicki Jackson-Kimbrell
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(w/o enclosures)